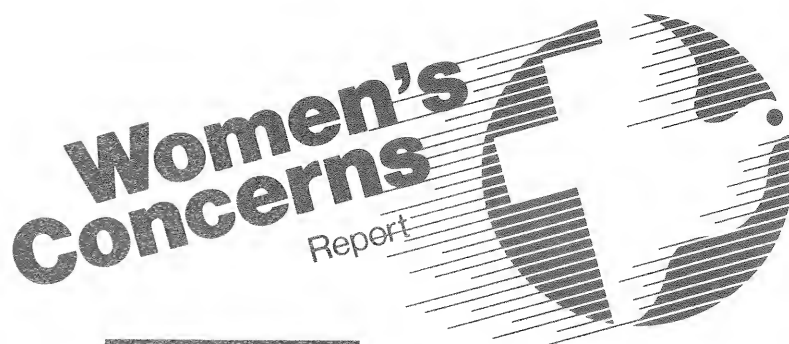


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## Women, Men

### and Housework

*...she selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family... When it snows, she has no fear for her household, for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; ...She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her. (Proverbs 31)*

Apart from this description of "the ideal woman," there are only indirect biblical references to what we know as housework. For example, after Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, "she got up and began to wait on him." (Matthew 8:14-15) This probably involved some food preparation. 1 Timothy mentions that a deacon "must manage his children and household well." (1 Timothy 3:12). This paucity of references may be because households likely consisted of extended families and thus housework may not have been as formidable a task as it sometimes appears to be today.

The term housework is vague, needing definition. As Ann Oakley says, "Housework is not a single activity. It is a collection of heterogeneous tasks which demand a variety of skills and kinds of action...To call all these jobs by the same name is to disguise their differences, to reduce them all to the same denominator. In fact, some are more liked than others; some are more repetitive, some less tiring, some more potentially creative..." (Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, p. 48)

Oakley breaks housework into six core tasks: cleaning, shopping, cooking, washing dishes, washing clothes and ironing. In her study, she found that the most universally disliked of these was ironing. Even the advent of "wash

and wear" clothing has not eliminated this as a dull job. The least disliked was cooking, which was seen as allowing more room for creativity.

Marjorie Schaevitz (1984) likens housework to jello... amorphous, variable and unorganized. Because housework is so hard to define, she contends, women have difficulty delegating it to their men.

Recent research bears out this difficulty. Women still do the major portion of housework, whether or not they work outside the home. A University of California researcher found that husbands did more housework when the woman held outside employment, but the amount did not approach equality. Interestingly, however, both husband and wife frequently perceived that they shared the work equally. (Schaevitz, p. 174)

Betty Frieden (1981) has stated that despite modern conveniences, the modern housewife spends far more time washing, drying and ironing than did her mother. She claims that because a woman has a freezer, she spends time growing a garden, and harvesting and preparing food for the freezer. Because she has an automatic washer, her family's standards of cleanliness have gone up. Store-bought foods, with all their additives, have created pressure to prepare homemade alternatives.

Frankly, I find some of these claims hard to accept. For example, while it is true that I do laundry several times a week, I cannot believe that the total time comes close to that expended by my mother in the early years of her marriage when she washed on a scrub board, hung the clothes on a line, took them down, then ironed the stiff and very wrinkled clothes with an iron heated on a woodstove. Unless, of course, the laundry that I am now doing as I type this paper counts as "laundry-doing hours."

Housework has a poor image. While it is absolutely necessary, it is not valued by society. In her study of 40 women, Oakley found a frequent complaint of housewives was being taken for granted. One wife said, "He usually comes home and says, 'You've got a cushy life.'" (Oakley, *Women's Work*, p. 113) Perhaps one reason for this view is that housework is unpaid. Society places little value on anything for which we do not receive a paycheck. Thus far, little progress has been made in seriously considering paying salaries to housewives. In



In order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: they must be fit for it; they must not do too much of it; and they must have a sense of success in it.

— John Ruskin

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Canada, however, there has been some talk of allowing housewives to participate in the Canada Pension Plan.

Since housework is a universal necessity, one way to make it more manageable and less unpleasant is to share it among family members. In *The Super Woman Syndrome*, Shaevitz outlines some "delegating steps." Some of us may object that the woman of the house should be the one to have to do the delegating, since this implies that she is ultimately responsible. Shaevitz argues, however, that obviously someone must take charge.

Feelings about housework are often tied into feelings about family life and structure. Some women fear that too brazen an attack on the drudgery and inequities of housework may ultimately mean having to take a stand against family life and the entire concept of home as we now think of it. Other women, however, criticize the nuclear family itself as part of a sexist social system keeping women tied to the home. (McBride)

One such person is Betty Frieden, who suggests that we need to think seriously about making some major changes in the structure of our homes. In *The Second Stage*, she gives an interesting account of three generations of early feminists who, between the end of the Civil War and the Depression, labored to win recognition for women's work. They engaged architects to design and build "revolutionary structures whereby couples, families and single people might inhabit a mix of kitchenless and 'conventional' homes sharing common parlors, dining rooms, kitchens, nurseries and other services." (p. 288)

She blames the abrupt halt in this kind of thinking after 1920 on various factors. One was manufacturers' desire to increase profits by selling appliances to individual households, rather than having them shared between several households. The advent of communism made many uneasy about labor organizations, of which early feminists were seen as an integral part. With government-sponsored GI mortgages and tax deductions for homeowners, people were strongly encouraged to buy homes.

Frieden says that even today we are afraid to restructure home and family life to meet our needs: "We do not accept 'women's sphere'; we negotiate with men about sharing these household chores. But we do not question the spatial design of these modern appliance-filled houses." (p. 297)

Frieden thinks we should. She goes on to describe her ideal home. However, she sees little of the kind of housing she dreams of. Sweden has some "service housing" for which there are long waiting lists. Frieden describes what she saw in Sweden: "People had their own apartments, pleasant living rooms, bedroom, balcony terrace and small kitchenette, but they also had a common childcare center, a nursery for babies and an after-school program. There was a common kitchen and dining room where all could take their meals—or pick them up after work to eat in their own apartments. They shared cleaning and gardening and laundry services, instead of each doing it separately." (p. 287)

In some ways Frieden's description reminds me of Emma Penner's account of her early years living in a Hutterite colony, shared in this *Report*. Other stories in this issue explore the drudgery of housework, as well as its rewards; the relationship of housework to hospitality; housework in Third World settings; team housework; and housework as seen by a househusband. The contributors to this issue represent a diversity of viewpoints. —Mildred Dyck

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**Mildred Dyck dusted off her typewriter to compile this issue of *Report*. She and her husband, Dave, share some household chores and try to instill a sense of responsibility in their three teen-age sons. Mildred also teaches high school English and math on a half-time basis in Winnipeg.**

"Sometimes I wonder if it is going to take the ravages of war to get the modern Christian American woman out of her home and her preoccupation with the trivia of housekeeping and hobbies and into the hurting world that needs her love and her message."

—Kari Torjeson Malcolm,  
*Women at The Crossroads*,  
Inter Varsity Press. 1982.



by Emma Penner

## Housework: A Personal Journey

Housework! I feel as if I have done it for most of my life, as indeed I have, ever since the age of 7. To better understand my long and arduous journey with housework, I need to give you some background.

For the first 18 years of my life, I lived in a Hutterite colony. I am the second youngest in a family of nine children. Both sisters are older than me. The fact that I lived in a highly sexist, chauvinistic communal culture shaped many of my later attitudes and responses to housework, as well as my approach to it.

The home in which I grew up was almost always kept spotless. Rarely do I remember seeing dust anywhere. The front room which served as an all-purpose living/dining room had a linoleum floor which was faithfully washed every day whether it needed it or not. Twice a year our whole house was cleaned from one end to the other by an army of women (my sisters, aunts and cousins). My mother's sole responsibility was to feed them. Those occasions were real highlights; the women sang while they worked and we younger children joined the feasting later in the day when the work was done.

The few times when our home was not meticulously clean were mostly when my father and brothers were making or redoing furniture. I do not recall seeing them clean up after their projects were finished; the women did that as a matter of course. My six brothers never made their beds or tidied up their room. They frequently came in with their work boots on, manure and dirt still clinging to them. We sometimes complained but I don't remember any major confrontation about their messy habits. Looking back, I think the women, especially my older sister, derived their sense of self-worth from serving the men.

Only once, when I was quite small, do I remember seeing my older brother wash the floor in our front room. The reason I remember the incident is because he placed my little brother and myself on top of our big, round table

with strict orders not to come down until he finished. It felt like we were very high up and it was fun to watch him.

Because of the communal structure, my mother seldom felt overburdened with housework even though she had a large family. Our four rooms took only a few hours to clean each week. Meals were cooked and served in the communal kitchen and dining room, again by women who took turns until they retired from that responsibility at 45.

As the youngest daughter, by the time I turned 7 it was apparent that there was not enough work for me in my own home. I was asked to "babysit" for my cousin who had a new baby every two years. "Babysitting" involved childcare, washing floors, dusting and helping with the laundry. When I was 15, I joined the adult work force and my responsibilities in my cousin's home ended.

I left the colony at age 18, married while attending university and we established our home in the city. During the next 12 years, we had three children and by mutual consent decided that Lloyd would be the breadwinner and I would care for the children during the day. It didn't seriously occur to me at that time that I would be happy doing anything else. I even quit my part-time library job so I could devote myself completely to my babies.

That was a big mistake. It took me awhile before I realized how much I missed the regular outside contact with other adults. I do not regret quitting my full-time job, but I know now that I would have been happier had I worked even a few hours each week outside the home. I blamed myself for my depression and kept telling myself that I should be happy. Didn't I have three beautiful children, a nice home and a reasonably happy marriage?

Very little in my upbringing had prepared me for this suburban lifestyle. My parents had been jointly responsible for many acres of garden in the colony. Because my mother did not have to cook three meals a day for her family, she had time for many other things, in addition to caring for us.

Initially, when our children were small, I made a valiant attempt to do most of the housework, cooking and shopping by myself. Lloyd was very helpful with the children once he came home from his job. He helped with the housework when he could. However, it was almost a matter of pride for me to do most of it myself. I envied

Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion and the thing to be done swells in importance and complexity in a direct ratio with the time to be spent.  
— C. Northcote Parkinson



my friends' spotless homes (at least they were spotless when I saw them) and tried to emulate them. Perhaps due to my earlier conditioning and socialization, I sought my identity through my husband, kids and expertise as a housewife.

Well, I have to confess that it never worked for me. I found housework meaningful sometimes, but just as often boring, trivial, depressing, frustrating and tiring. Cleaning especially seemed never-ending. I can vouch for Betty Frieden's statement that "housework expands to fill the time available."

The last three years have been markedly different from the previous 12. Lloyd is now working half time, partly so that I can develop my own interests and gifts outside of our home. The kids are school age and heavily involved in sports and music lessons. Lloyd is primarily responsible for them in these areas and also does all the vacuuming, not as a "helper" but as the person in charge in our three-story house. He in turn delegates to our children their share of other household duties.

Sometimes the work doesn't get done. I feel OK about that, but I do not jump in and bail anyone out. I have chosen instead to spend many happy hours sewing, reading and cooking creatively for our family, close friends and extended family. I enjoy that very much and we seldom eat out. For heavier spring cleaning, I frequently get help from relatives who live in the city. Working together brings back happy memories of our past when we still lived in the colony.

The rest of my time is spent studying at the local university. Because I am constantly challenged intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, cooking and even washing dishes now provide a therapeutic outlet for my new-found energies. Because it is a free choice on my part, I feel energized by it. One day recently I spent eight hours in the kitchen, leaving only to go to the bathroom!

In retrospect, I think that had I trusted my own inner feelings sooner, my experience with housework would have been less frustrating in our earlier years of marriage. Our solution is not very radical but it is workable for us at the present. In the final analysis, I believe what often makes housework sheer drudgery has a lot to do with its being done in isolation, leading to its being devalued. I am of the opinion that paying wages for housework is not the key factor determining its meaningfulness. In my communal experience, housework was unpaid and

relegated to women and girls, but it was never devalued to the extent that I have experienced and witnessed in nuclear families in our urban contexts. ■

**Emma Penner will seek employment as a counselor after completing the Supervised Pastoral Education program at the University of Winnipeg. She has a bachelor's degree in English and history.**

by Nan Doerksen

## A Means to An End

I have a love-hate relationship with housework. On the one hand, I like things to be orderly and spotless. On the other, I face the constant frustration of newly polished windows splattered, cat hairs on vacuumed rugs and mildew on the recently painted bathroom ceiling. No matter how perfectly the silver is cleaned, I know it will tarnish again. My well-fed family will be hungry again tomorrow. The work is never done.

A few years ago Japanese friends brought us a beautiful doll dressed in authentic early Japanese costume, real hair enticingly coiffed, arms stretched out alluringly. She is encased in a glass display box, forever unchanged, not to be played with. Young friends who come to visit find her both attractive and baffling.

Homes are not display cases; somehow a compromise must be found. With modern cleaning appliances, frostless refrigerators and self-cleaning ovens, three hours out of 24 is probably enough to keep most houses reasonably clean and the family well fed. Housework, except for those who clean for others for pay, is not a full-time occupation. Even my mother, who lived on a farm and had nine children and few modern appliances, had time for outside interests. Housework, then, is only a small (but important) part of a much larger challenge: that of homemaking, which encompasses all of Proverbs 31 and the several enjoinders to "practice hospitality" given to both men and women in the New Testament.

For me, housework is primarily a means to an end. I want my house to be a place in which my family can relax and be renewed, where I can think and recreate my thoughts.



I want my family to be healthy, therefore a certain standard of cleanliness and cooking must be maintained. That does not mean *I* have to do all the work, but someone has to take primary responsibility to see that it gets done. To sit down to a hot, well-planned meal at the end of the day in the comfortable companionship of one's family is like a benediction.

Secondly, we like to invite others to our home. Dozens of foreign and Canadian students come here to eat, to talk, to study the Bible and to show us their children. We have received letters from distant parts of the world saying such things as, "What I miss most is your cookies." Recently a Barbadian student confided to me that he especially enjoys the freshly baked rolls and biscuits I make. Today the mother of one Canadian student phoned long distance from British Columbia to chat. Her son who used to visit us died here three years ago, and she stayed with us part of the time that he was in intensive care. I don't know if we have fed any "angels unawares" but it is just as gratifying to feed people. It is not necessary to be a gourmet cook or to have a spotless home to practice hospitality; a relaxed, friendly atmosphere is more important than exotic meals.

Housework can challenge one's creativity. I'm not particularly artistic but trying new recipes, looking for bargains to replace worn-out furnishings, refinishing antique or old furniture, and arranging flowers are all interesting aspects of housework for me.

Housework is also a good outlet for stress. Something about the routine, almost ritualistic motion of scrubbing floors, washing dishes, hanging out clothes soothes and relaxes me after a frustrating, perhaps confrontational, committee or board meeting or the concentration of writing an article or story to meet a deadline. Housework costs less than aerobic dance classes and can be done while listening to music, listening to "Morningside" or while praying.

Perhaps Paul's admonition to the Colossian Christians — "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17) — is applicable to the often tedious rounds of housework, too, giving them a luminosity not achieved through any commercial product. ■

**Nan Doerksen is a homemaker and free-lance writer in Fredericton, New Brunswick. She has worked as a registered nurse and after her children were in school, she returned to school to earn bachelors and masters degrees in English.**

by Joan Gerig and Orlando Redekopp

## Housework by Negotiation

Prior to our marriage 10 years ago, we talked about sharing housework and agreed that since we would both be working outside of the home, we would also both do the work inside the home.

Nevertheless, during our first month of marriage Joan found herself making supper most evenings and getting angry about it. When she confronted Orlando on the need to share the responsibility for cooking supper, he merely shrugged and said peanut butter sandwiches would make a fine supper for him but if she wanted more than peanut butter, she was welcome to fix it. Our premarital conversations had not taken into account the day-to-day realities of housework.

Out of the contradiction of training and expectations, we negotiated a way to handle the issue. Orlando would cook two evenings a week, Joan the same, one evening we would fend for ourselves (peanut butter evening) and weekends we would do on an ad hoc basis. Orlando would have to learn to make supper, as under some pushing he confessed the peanut butter was probably his way of evading responsibility for this daily necessity.

Essentially that pattern of negotiation and trade-off has been our solution to household chores. For the past four years we have assigned tasks in light of who is least interested in or bothered by certain chores and sights. Joan notices the dust on bookshelves or under the chairs, so does those jobs. Orlando feels he can handle specific tasks that have little ambiguity about them: every week the carpet needs vacuuming and the bathtub cleaning. Joan washes the windows before her family comes for a visit and Orlando takes care of the laundry. Taking a week's worth of diapers and the baby to the laundromat was not a chore Joan envied. Because his re-education is taking longer than expected, however, Orlando still sometimes needs to be assigned extra tasks for special occasions: "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

After several moves we have learned the importance of immediately assigning chores. We do this because



otherwise we know the “old nature” may take over. For example, once we know our work schedules (we both work part time), then meal preparation, shopping, laundry and cleaning are divided up according to preference and time.

Sharing housework works well for us since we also contribute equally to the household income and the care of our daughter. We find a pay-off beyond the meals, reasonably clean house and clothes: our daughter is growing up with few preconceived notions of women’s work and men’s work. ■

**Joan Gerig teaches at an alternative school for high school drop-outs and push-outs in Chicago. Her husband, Orlando Redekopp, pastors a small integrated urban church. They have worked with MCC in Winnipeg and southern Africa.**

by Leona Dueck Penner

## “Women’s Work” in South Africa

A while ago an educated Swazi woman said to me:

“If you’re black in southern Africa, you’re at the bottom of the ladder, and if you’re *black and a woman*, you’re right out of sight.”

Thinking about that statement in the light of my assigned topic of housework in a Third-World setting, I began to feel that one of the reasons why South African women are “right out of sight” is at least partially related to the amount of housework and other family responsibilities they must carry.

Like the capable, virtuous women who are praised in Proverbs, they too are extremely hard-working, always busy from early in the morning to late at night, bringing home produce from out-of-the-way places, preparing and cooking food, caring for children, feeding animals, planting fields and gardens, carrying water, sewing, weaving, cleaning, selling whatever they can to earn a few extra cents to send the children to school...

The list of things they do goes on and on; it exhausts me just thinking about the sheer unending drudgery of it all.

I can easily understand that with so much housework to do, there is very little time or energy for most Third World women to make a visible place for themselves within the wider work world or in the running of the community. It’s no wonder that the women remain hidden and that they’re not even within sight of the lowest ladder rungs.

Then, to top it all off, instead of receiving “credit” and “respect” for all the work they do, as the Proverbs writer says they should, they are more often than not unrecognized as contributing, worthwhile community members. At best, their work is taken for granted. At worst, it is denigrated as merely “women’s work,” something which admittedly has to be done, but which is very much beneath the dignity of the male members of their society.

The 20th century, with its money-based economy, has affected the role of men and women in Third World settings. Nowadays, the African husband is no longer solely responsible for being the provider, “the one who brings home the meat” in a literal sense! Maybe he never was. At any rate, his hunting days are mostly a thing of the past and he, like millions of other males the world over, is busy trying to earn money to buy the meat. And, like millions of other females, many Third World women are also “out there” assisting their husbands with this task. Unfortunately, however, this does not mean that the housework is also shared. Instead, it means that the women now have twice as much work, their own housework plus that of their employer. For, more often than not, they end up working as “domestics” in other people’s homes.

This double-job situation is very familiar to First World women as well, but the difference is that at this stage Third World women more easily accept their lot and even feel a need to shield their husbands from what they consider to be demeaning labor.

I remember so well a conversation I had with my Swazi language teacher. A young woman, quite “Westernized” and reasonably well educated, she was horrified when she learned that my husband helped with the cooking and cleaning.

“But that’s not right, Make (Mother)! That’s woman’s work!” she cried. “A man should not do that!”

She just couldn’t seem to understand my argument that if we both worked outside the home, then the work inside



There is dignity in work only  
when it is work freely accepted.  
— Albert Camus



should also be shared. Male prestige and pride had to be protected. They shouldn't have to lower themselves to women's level and do what was considered "women's work."

There was no question in her mind that this was the "right" way of doing things. She did not seem to feel put upon or taken advantage of. All that she asked for was a kind man, one who didn't drink, didn't beat her, didn't take a second wife.

She was more than happy to do the housework, and to work outside the home as long as she had a "good" husband who shared some of his money with the family.

In fact, she was happy to even have a house in which to do housework. She counted herself luckier than most and was happy for every "convenience" that she had — a wood stove, a second-hand clunker of a fridge, a young relative to look after her children while she worked... She knew that many of her friends were much worse off than she, and cherished her situation accordingly. She knew that it could all vanish in an instant, if she or her husband lost their jobs or if her husband took another woman. This, unfortunately, he eventually did.

I guess what I'm saying is that doing all the housework is not an issue for most Third World women. At this stage, most of them fully accept it as women's work. They still accept their lower status in society and are willing to take on very much more than their share of the workload. They do this without complaining because theirs is still a struggle for survival. They are trying to keep their kids alive and they can't yet afford to worry about their own rights or their own personal fulfillment, as we do. They are working hard to get their kids some sort of place on the ladder of life, and are not even dreaming of becoming visible themselves. They are satisfied to be "out of sight," doing the work behind the scenes, if it means there will be a better world (or any world at all), for their children.

It's not that they are totally unselfish but that they are fully committed to their offspring because they know that it is only as their children survive and begin to climb the ladder that they themselves will have any sort of future in their old age. They are willing to work very hard for that. ■

**Leona Dueck Penner shares many things with her husband: housework, parenting of two teen-age sons and a job outside the home. She and Peter are co-directors of the Peace and Social Concerns office of MCC Canada. From 1981 to 1985, they shared the job of MCC country representatives in Swaziland and Mozambique.**

by Phil Hofer

## Reflections of a Flexible Parent

My 5-year-old daughter, Emily, and I do the laundry and go grocery shopping on Friday mornings. Recently I was talking with a woman who was folding her family's clothes. She commented that I seemed to know what I was doing with the clothes. When I said I always do the laundry, her jaw dropped a bit and she said, "Really?" She seemed even more surprised when, a bit later, I said that I also do the grocery shopping. "Wow!" she said. The experience reminded me that, depending on one's perspective, the extent to which I do household-related work seems unusual. Within my circle of friends, my fairly extensive involvement in household-related activities brings no wows and no dropped jaws. People who know me are used to seeing me shopping, housecleaning and hanging out the wash.

Our family returned to the United States in 1982 after three years with MCC. We moved to Akron, Pa. because Joy was offered a job as a writer in the Information Services department of MCC. When we came, Emily was 2 and Jeremy was 6. Now, Emily attends the afternoon sessions of the local kindergarten while Jeremy is in the fourth grade. When we moved here I accepted the role of "primary parent" in part because we chose this place for Joy's work and in part because doing so freed me for consulting work on Central America.

If one's vision of a househusband is that he is responsible for much of the cooking, cleaning and laundering, then I am that. I have been home with Emily and present when Jeremy returns home after school. When my work outside the home takes me away, I make childcare arrangements with friends and neighbors. This year, so I can work outside, Jeremy and Emily attend an after-school program.

I don't feel very comfortable commenting on how I view my role in the home primarily because of how I view the home. Our lives together in Central America did much to foster in me an attitude towards the family that is, for me, central to the subject. During the first year and a half



there, Joy was home with Jeremy and gave birth to Emily while I worked outside more. During the last half of our time there we moved from Joy being at home all of the time to our sharing two separate part-time jobs equally.

I vision the family significantly in terms of its relationship to the world around it, of its interacting with the world, and of its addressing the world. MCC was conducive to living out that "way of the family." While the tendency in North America is to compartmentalize, with one person "earning the living" and the other "at home," I am not comfortable with that dichotomy.

My mother taught her three sons to clean up their rooms, vacuum, wash and dry dishes. I don't remember her saying it was "women's work" to do housework, though I realize that may have been in part because we had no sister. My mother's attitude may have something to do with my unwillingness to view the family strictly — or even heavily — in terms of roles.

I have been grateful for the way Joy has encouraged me to explore how to be a flexible parent more effectively, in ways that encourage my personal development and in ways that nurture our life together as a family.

However, I cannot escape the fact that for the last three years I have been practicing a new role and have experienced conflict with that role. I remember, for example, when we were visited by a number of former Guatemalan co-workers. Following our final breakfast together at our home, they all left to resume their normal duties, I mine. But my duties were those of cleaning up after them and taking care of Emily. After they left, I sat down and cried. Who was I? What value did I have? Where was I "going," particularly measured against other men, all of whom were "working"?

I knew that those questions were the same ones that plague many women who think about their own value vis-a-vis their housework. I was certainly not better for the fact I was a *man* asking those questions. Still, realizing that many women confronted those questions did not lessen the tension I felt. And yes, it did seem to me at times that *my* dilemma was somehow greater than that most women faced: I would have this odd space of three years or so without a profession that would make me more unsuitable than they for re-entry into the job market. They could begin from "scratch" at the point they decided to pursue a profession. I could tell myself objectively that this was not the case, but subjectively it gave me reason to feel sorry for myself.

I am grateful for good friends during these years. My best friend has been Barbara, who, like me, has coordinated household work, remained flexible and embarked on various part-time voluntary and slightly remunerative jobs. I was reminded how comfortable Barb was with me being one of her counterparts when, in an evening conversation with my parents who were visiting from California, my mother asked her if she did not think it a bit odd that I was the househusband doing all the household tasks I was doing. Barb paused and replied, "Oh, I never thought of that."

I later reminded Barb that I could recall a few expressions of glee from her when, upon picking up Jeremy and Emily from her home, I would tell her I had to get home quickly because my supper was on the stove. Her comment, though, did reflect how I felt about our relationship, for I have always felt her acceptance of my roles as father, husband, Central American activist and household manager. I have similarly felt accepted in those roles by her husband, Harold, who is also a good friend.

There have been times when my children, in their play, have reminded me that Joy and I are doing things a bit differently. Emily, I think, is reluctant to see herself outside the more traditional female roles such as nurse, housewife and homemaker. At least her play would suggest that. She tends to be more conscious of her clothes and her dolls while Jeremy has tended to build with his Legos and play ball. Finally though, I conclude that the less we talk about proper role behavior and the more we live our "reversals" comfortably, the better both for their accepting us and for their being free along the way to choose to embrace (or reject) the way we have chosen to do things in our home.

I must finally remind myself that I have little control over how I am perceived by others. Once, when preparing to swim at the local recreation center, I met the father of one of Jeremy's classmates in the locker room. When I introduced myself, he paused and then with a look of recognition he smiled and said (just as his wife had once said to me in the grocery store), "Oh yes, you are Jeremy's dad, the househusband." I didn't argue. What else do you call a man who is a flexible parent? ■

**"Househusband" Phil Hofer is also known for his efforts on behalf of Central American refugees; he is coordinator of the Lancaster (Pa.) Interreligious Network for Central American Refugee Action. He and Joy worked with MCC in Guatemala from 1980 to 1982. Prior to that, Phil was an administrator and lecturer at Fresno (Calif.) Pacific College.**





by Irene Penner

## On the Need for Hospitality

I began my 23-year career as a housewife shortly after Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem had launched the feminist movement and every women's magazine was touting the glories of "career" life while bemoaning the miseries, doldrums and frustrations of homemaking. With women's magazines denigrating the traditional roles of wife and mother and television shows uniformly portraying the homemaker as dull, stupid and homely, it is small wonder that the word "housework" conjures up instant and intense negative feelings.

I am no stranger to these feelings, having been thoroughly demoralized by the media hype, the stifled yawns at cocktail parties and my husband's predictable evening greeting, "And what did you do today, dear?" Admitting to being a housewife carries a serious social stigma in our society. Yes, housework is drudgery. As an end in itself it would seem to have few of the job satisfactions one normally anticipates in a career.

So why would a reasonably intelligent, university-educated woman choose to stay in this role for nearly a quarter century? Through careful and rather painful self-analysis, I have come up with several reasons. The first is inertia: an inability to make the difficult choice to go back to work knowing that financially it made no sense, physically and emotionally I probably couldn't handle it and the resulting strain would not enhance my marriage or family life. Furthermore, I could think of few jobs or careers that wouldn't quickly become as routine as housework. With the insight and wisdom that comes with maturity, I gradually came to see my role as something of a privilege as well as a responsibility.

Due to the increasing number of marriage breakdowns, to real or perceived financial difficulties or the societal pressure to be successful and fulfilled, most women opt for careers outside the home. The majority of women are now in the marketplace and struggling valiantly to juggle

the demands of two full-time jobs. The resulting frustrations, grinding exhaustion and emotional pressure, and the toll these take on family relationships are finally being acknowledged. It is impossible for a woman to successfully fulfill all the demands of career, family, social and church life. The superwoman glowingly described in *McCalls*, *Chatelaine* or *Redbook* simply doesn't exist. She is a myth.

Because she cannot practically meet the demands of her various roles, a woman has choices to make — hard choices which reveal the nature of her priorities and the reality and sincerity of her Christian faith. Obviously, many women who have to work for financial reasons have no choice. For the many others for whom finances are not a primary consideration, the choice can be painful and costly. Most simply stated, the choice is between building one's own empire and seeking first the kingdom of God.

Jesus looked on the crowds of his day and saw them as harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. How much more accurately do his words describe our own society. Because of ignorance regarding Christian values and morals, marital breakdown and lack of good parenting, there are huge numbers of people in our society who are truly desperate lost sheep. Some Christians need to choose to be available to help meet the needs so blatantly obvious especially in our large cities. The person who is free from the need to work for financial reasons is in the best position to serve in this way.

My own growing awareness of the sickness of our society, coupled with an increasing desire to obey God's will even at cost to myself, have led me to seek avenues of service to others. Furthermore, our involvement during the past 12 years with a community church and with an increasing number of nonchristians has served to broaden our awareness of the needs around us.

Service to others, of course, can take an infinite variety of shapes. Simply taking time to listen to another carefully and attentively can be very therapeutic. Solid, well-structured evangelistic Bible studies led by laypeople are effective and life changing. There is a crying need for good old-fashioned hospitality, fast becoming an obsolete virtue in our fast-paced society.

I have had numerous opportunities to extend hospitality to friends and strangers through Sunday after-church lunches, Boxing Day open houses, New Year's Eve



A house is no home unless it contains food and fuel for the mind as well as for the body.  
— Margaret Fuller

parties, home Bible studies, dinner parties and casual afternoon coffees. I have found all of these excellent, both for evangelism and the building up of the saints. Occasionally we have taken people in for extended periods of time, a special kind of hospitality with unique stresses and not to be undertaken lightly, but one affording unequalled opportunities for teaching and modelling. All of these take much time, energy and effort and require an ongoing determination to put others before oneself. Of course, they also bring great joy and eternal rewards.

Jesus said he came not to be served but to serve. The lifestyle he modelled and later commanded his followers to adopt for themselves certainly stands in stark contrast to the “me first” philosophy of our generation. We as Christians, however, are not to allow society to squeeze us into its mold. We are called instead to swim upstream. ■

**Irene Penner, parent of three grown children and former high school English teacher, is a resident of Vancouver, British Columbia.**

by Jane Andres

## Guess Who Does the Dishes?

It would not be true to say that my husband, Pete, and I have come to where we are in terms of team housework mainly because of a long-standing belief and conviction that this is the way it ought to be. Although Pete comes from a home where all were expected to do their share and believes that the work of the home is not just the job of women, I would still say that circumstances and the social climate of the day have played a big part in allowing us to comfortably make the decisions we chose to make. I would also say that the extent to which we shared housework over the years has varied depending on the kind of work we were involved in outside the home.

When we were students or when we were both working outside the home, as we did in our first years of marriage in Zambia, we shared household tasks. But under those circumstances, the tasks were not heavy because, number

one, we weren't there long enough to make the house dirty, and number two, Bo Sililo did the floors, washed the dishes, lit the fire for the hot water and, I think, even did the laundry. That left the cooking and the supper dishes. If I remember correctly, I cooked and Pete did the dishes. Later, while we both studied, things regressed a bit in that I did the cooking, shopping, laundry and cleaning and Pete did the dishes. Since there were only the two of us and we were living in a small, easily kept apartment and we are both fairly tidy, cleaning was not a chore.

The next stage of our lives took us to Lesotho, once again with MCC. We agreed that while we were there we would adopt the more traditional pattern of wife at home with children and husband working outside the home. This was fine with me and I enjoyed those three years at home, mothering our first two boys and doing many of the household chores. Pete helped with shopping, gardening and the dishes.

Real team housework actually began when we took an assignment with MCC in Winnipeg as Volunteer Service Coordinators for Manitoba. With MCC's consent, we agreed to share this job. I was ready to spend some time out of the home and Pete was ready to spend some time in the home so we agreed that I would go to the office two days a week and Pete would go the other three. This arrangement worked out very well. We both enjoyed the MCC work a lot, but we also enjoyed the slower pace at home, the time with the boys and the time to work on some home projects.

When I was at the office, Pete was parent-in-charge. This meant everything from changing diapers, kissing damp cheeks, babysitting for our neighbor to vacuuming the house and cooking the meals. I think he may even have done the dishes, too. On my days at home I did the same, except that instead of vacuuming I did the laundry. Somewhere in there the shopping got done by one of us while the other stayed with the children. These were enjoyable years and we felt fortunate that our “outside” job allowed us to share housework and family care in this way.

When we took a year off from MCC work and Pete worked eight hours a day as a laborer, most of the housework fell to me. But Pete still did the dishes.

Now we are in Jamaica for five years, presently as country representatives for MCC. Once again we are able to share our outside-the-home work, as well as our inside-the-home work. Actually it's difficult to differentiate

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between the two, since our office is at the house and the people we relate to often come to our home. Circumstances are a little different in that our three boys are now all at school, which means that both of us can do office work in the mornings instead of taking turns. As it often is in a Third World setting, we have a "helper" who does the laundry and cleans the house for us. But the other things that need doing, such as packing school lunches, preparing meals, shopping, getting the children bathed, helping them with their homework, reading bedtime stories, driving the boys to various activities and yes, doing the dishes, are all done by one or the other of us interchangeably. We find that rather than formally dividing up the chores, for the most part each of us tackles things as they need doing. Where we have divided up the chores, this is based mostly on our abilities or interests. For instance, Pete really doesn't enjoy preparing meals, so I do that. And I really don't enjoy (you guessed it) doing the dishes so Pete does that.

We feel that we've gotten into a routine that has evolved, rather than one that was planned from the start, and that it has happened in a relaxed, unstressful way. Occasionally, we check signals to make sure we aren't taking advantage of one another or that one of us is unhappy with the work he or she does more often. As a result, we have made changes where necessary or expressed appreciation and continued on.

When we return to Canada in a few years the situation will change again because I suspect that Pete and I will both be working outside the home and probably not at the same job. This will probably affect our boys the most because I can foresee the day when they will be expected to play a greater part in team housework than they have had to in this Third World helper-oriented setting. And I think because their father has been such a willing, capable model for so many years, after the initial shock such things as preparing meals and doing laundry will seem a natural outcome of their new circumstances in do-it-yourself North America. ■

Jane Andres, together with her husband, Pete, are MCC country representatives in Jamaica. They have worked with MCC continually since 1971, except for a one-year break in 1979.

by Deborah and Robert Martin Koop



## Co-Homemakers

This is the age of co-. We, it seems, are part of it. We became co-spouses of a marriage six years ago, co-pastors of a Mennonite Fellowship five years ago and co-parents of a little boy four years ago. And when *Report* asked us to submit an article on our "team housework," we attempted to be co-authors.

The question was how we co-ordinate it. Is it unique? Does it have a special stress? What is it?

One thing is sure, being co-homemakers is not a mastered art. We are tempted to believe that our work in the church, our children, our friends and our building renovations, among other things, are at fault for a less than well-ordered household. Somehow the vision of windows and walls washed every six months, floors mopped every two weeks, dusting done every week, dishes washed three times a day, fresh-baked bread and homemade clothes remains unattained.

Rest assured. We do not live in utter turmoil. Our house is comfortable, our clothes are clean, our food is healthy and tasty, our bathroom does not always smell of dirty diapers. Maybe that is all that is needed and we are, after all, good co-houseworkers.

We have attempted various styles in our co-responsibilities. When Debby was at home on maternity leaves, she got bored with housework. Because of demands from a newborn and the lack of contact with other adults, things did not get done to her satisfaction. But when we were laissez faire about our household, we became edgy and embarrassed. When we wanted to be "like our mothers," we longed for a good book and became defensive about our "orderliness."

Our hope is that when we are finished with renovations, friends and children, then our house will be easier to keep clean. Perhaps things will change when the children are in school, but then we hear they bring friends home and eat

• **Women's Resources**

**Freehand** offers a seven-month intensive course in poetry, prose, photography, bodywork and performance to women. For more information contact the organization at P.O. Box 806, Provincetown, Mass. 02657.

The Institute of Mennonite Studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries is sponsoring a consultation

June 20-22 on the topic "**Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics: Women's Perspectives.**" Although the participants will be primarily Mennonite women who are working in Bible or biblical theology at a graduate level, a limited number of observers are welcome. For more information, write to Elizabeth Yoder, AMBS, 3003 Benham Ave., Elkhart, Ind. 46517.

**Women in Parish Ministry: Stress and Support** is a new resource available from The Alban Institute. United Methodist minister Marian Coger interviewed women pastors in her own and other denominations to analyze the stresses clergywomen encounter and the kinds of support they find helpful. The book is available for \$5.50, plus \$1.50 postage and handling,

from the Alban Institute, 4125 Nebraska Ave. NW, Washington D.C. 20016.

ravenously, not necessarily cleaning up afterwards. We also hear that there are parent-teacher meetings, school concerts, peewee tournaments, trombone lessons and sleep-over birthday parties. And what about the future of renovations and friends?

A live-in housekeeper sounds attractive but the budget won't allow it. It may also threaten our co-image. So we have reached a compromise. At least we think we have. Debby works at the office two days a week; Bob is there three days. Whoever is home cooks and cleans whatever is obviously in need of such attention. Whoever goes out in the evening or has spent the day away from home gives the boys a co-bath while the other cleans up the supper dishes. If the bathroom needs attention during bathtime, the one giving the bath is responsible. Whoever feels like folding clothes when the boys are in the bathtub does it. Whatever doesn't get folded during the day may get folded during *The National*.

The frequency of floor washing varies. When and how it is done depends on the duration of naps, number of phone interruptions, how many evenings we have been out, how many visitors have come and gone, how many times we have played in the park. Our children, at least, are helpful. Pierre-Joel, our 16-month-old, makes sure the floors are swept several times a day, either end of the broom will do, and Jonathan, our 4-year-old, helps by towing pillow and blanket across the floor while playing camping.

We have considered early retirement. Just imagine. Plenty of time for children, housework, reading all the church periodicals, volunteer work. Bliss! But our friends think that might be a bit premature since we have barely reached the 30's.

On further reflection, we wonder if our life is all that different from our parents', who are farmers and urban missionaries. They, too, had to learn to work together and to postpone some of the things they might have liked to do. From them we learned that children and friends and strangers are more important than home-baked bread and home-sewn shirts.

Perhaps the age of co- began earlier than we thought. ■

Deborah and Robert Martin Koop are co-pastors of Montreal Mennonite Fellowship, as well as co-parents of two sons. Both have worked with MCC in the past.

## Letters

Could you please put me on your mailing list? I have been reading the *Report on Women in Decision-Making* in Mennonite Institutions (No. 63) and feel the same concerns many of the women have shared. I live in a Mennonite community and work in the local mental health center.

I am so glad that women and men have seen the gift in having more involvement of women in decision-making roles. The women's movement is an assertive step in liberating both men and women. There is an importance in balance that is complementary.

— J. Wiens, Hillsboro, Kan.

The Sept.-Oct. 1985 issue of the *Report* is excellent. Thanks for putting it together. Sometimes it takes cold statistics to make us sit up and take notice. Progress has been made but especially in the case of the MCC boards there is still a lot of work to be done. We needed the reminder.

I think it is true that women often miss out on the confidence-building processes that seem to be part of the network for men. While young men are being groomed to lead, young women are trying to learn how it is done and if they are capable without that reassuring nudge forward by someone who assumes their potential. Of course the best remedy for this is an increase in the number of women in traditionally male positions, but until that is a reality we must remain conscious of the need and work to meet it in other ways.

The seven suggestions for facilitating the participation of women in decision-making and leadership compiled by the group of women leaders in "Experiences Shared" are, in my opinion, exactly what is needed. The very thought of these being carried out is exhilarating. Please let me know if I can help!

— Betsy Headrick McCrae, Minneapolis, Minn.

**Religious and lay women from 15 Asian and Oceanic countries** came together from Oct. 7-17 to reflect on "the mission of women in the church in Asia: their role and position." Meeting in Seoul, Korea, participants said they felt called to meet after seeing "the depth and breadth of the exploitation and oppression of women in Asia and realizing the need to discover our place

as women religious in their struggle."

The selective abortion of female fetuses and sexual discrimination in property rights were major issues at a national conference on trends in the Indian women's movement. Participants to the conference, held Nov. 27-30 at the Ecumenical Christian Centre near Bangalore, India, expressed special concern

over the increase in female feticide resulting from the availability of new medical techniques for determining fetal sex.

Hecklers interrupted the December ordination of the first female Episcopal priest in a Dallas, Texas diocese. When presiding Bishop Patterson asked for members of the congregation to make known any impediments or crimes,

one of six protesters said that the ordination of Gwen Buehrens would depart and detract from woman's ministry of childbearing.

"Since we heard neither of an impediment nor a crime, we will continue," replied the ordaining bishop.

I just received the Sept.-Oct. issue of *Women's Concerns Report* (on women in decision-making) last week. It is very impressive. The content is well-researched and hard-hitting and the new format and type gives it more authority. Congratulations!

— Elizabeth G. Yoder, Assistant Director, Institute of Mennonite Studies, Elkhart, Ind.

I came upon two issues of *Report* very much by chance. They were handed to me by a man who I hardly knew at the church I have been going to for the last five months. They were the May-June and July-August issues and I remember commenting, "Kinda outdated isn't it?" (This was in December 1985.)

Today I'm eating my words! (Pass the ketchup, please.) At first I could not believe my eyes that such deep-feeling feminism was being printed through a Mennonite publication. The reading has not just turned my thoughts around, it has brought tears of joy to my eyes that my feminist 'controversies' are being upheld, supported and talked about by a Mennonite publication. You have shed light into my darkness, rekindled my trust in Mennonite culture. What strength I have found!

I am interested in subscribing to *Report*. Women's Development: A Critique of Existing Theory (No. 61) is exceptionally well-written and researched.

Thank you for the dedication and hard work it takes to make such a publication possible.

— Kate Neudorf, Langley, British Columbia

Enclosed is a contribution to help publish *Report*. I appreciate every issue I receive.

— Barbara Shannon, Lindsborg, Kan.

Thank you for the good, solid work put into the issue on Women and Decision-Making in Mennonite Institutions. It is important to see how far we've come, but more important is to look at where we need to go yet. I would have appreciated seeing the figures of where we are now put beside figures of what we think will be equitable, fair, productive and *creative* — a goal we commit ourselves to reach.

— Dorothy Friesen, Chicago, Ill.

## News and Verbs

Connie Faber, director of admissions at Tabor (Kan.) College, has been elected treasurer of the National Association of Christian College Admissions Personnel.

Barbara K. Reber of Goshen, Ind. has been appointed executive director of the Inter-Mennonite Council on Aging, a part-time position. She will also continue her part-time service as executive secretary of the Women's Missionary and Service Commission of the Mennonite Church.

Jo Ellen Johnsen is the leader of a new Mennonite congregation in Pasadena, Calif., the Peace in Christ Church. Johnsen, a recent graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary, was commissioned for church planting work by the congregation of Faith Mennonite Church in nearby Downey.

Mennonite artist Sylvia Doerksen has been working for 28 years as staff illustrator with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. Some of her better-known designs include Smokey the Bear and Woodsy Owl.

Joan Wiebe has resigned her position as Women in Mission coordinator of the General Conference Mennonite Church to accept a call with her husband, Leonard, to start a new church in Denver, Colo. Leonard has pastored Faith Mennonite Church in Newton, Kan. for the past 12 years.

Linda Neufeld of Edmonton, Alberta received accreditation as a clinical specialist by the Canadian Association of Pastoral Education last October.

Canadians Rachel Reesor and Rachel Friesen are among the first recipients of scholarships from the June Schwartztruber Trust Fund. Reesor is studying at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries and Friesen at Toronto School of Theology.

The fund was established in memory of a longtime urban mission worker who was particularly interested in women in church leadership and in minority, urban and social justice concerns.

• **Committee on Women's Concerns Announcements**

The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns is seeking candidates to serve as the U.S. Mennonite Church representative on the seven-member binational committee. The position is currently filled by Joyce Eby of Harrisonburg, Va. whose term ends this summer. For more information or to express interest, contact Emily Will, MCC, Box M, Akron, Pa. 17501.

Betsy Beyler of Fairfax, Va. has agreed to serve as the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns representative to MCC Peace Section. Betsy formerly served as assistant director of the MCC U.S. Peace Section Washington Office. She and her husband welcomed son Daniel to their family last September.



Illustrations in this issue are drawn by Kathy Penner, a freelance illustrator who is working out of her home in Winnipeg as she awaits the birth of a second child.

A one-day seminar on pornography and sexual violence, sponsored by MCC Manitoba, was held Jan. 25 in Winnipeg. Three Old Colony leaders were among the audience; they related that family violence among their church members was a larger problem than the church leadership could handle.

Martha Bergmann, past coordinator of the Morden/Winkler Committee on Family Violence, testified to the high incidence of incest and wife abuse in southern Manitoba and attitudes common to some that "fathers have the right to break in their daughters." (from *Mennonite Reporter*, Feb. 3, 1986)

Jet Birondo, a woman who has dedicated her life to work with victims of injustice, Brenda Stoltzfus, an MCCer working with hospitality women at Olongapo, and Karl Gaspar, a church leader who was recently released after two years in prison, were among the resource people at a conference on the Philippines Feb. 19-22 in Minneapolis. The conference was co-sponsored by MCC Peace Section and East Asia department.

*REPORT* is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in *Report* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee

on Women's Concerns.

Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Emily Will, Editor, MCC, Box M, Akron, PA 17501.

U.S. residents may send subscriptions to the above address. Canadian residents may send subscriptions to MCC Canada, 201-1483 Pembina Highway, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2C8. A donation of \$6.00 per year per subscription is suggested.

Marvin and Donita Payne Hostetler are serving as pastoral leaders of the First Mennonite Church of Lincoln, Neb.

Keith Sprunger, history professor at Bethel (Kan.) College, has written a chapter about Anabaptist women for a recently published history book. His chapter, "God's Powerful Army of the Weak: Anabaptist Women of the Radical Reformation" is included in the book *Triumph over Silence: Women in Protestant History*. The book, edited by Richard L. Greaves, is published by Greenwood Press.

The ordination of Susan Ortman Goering to pastoral ministry at Arvada (Colo.) Mennonite Church was celebrated on Feb. 16.

Former Committee on Women's Concerns member Jan Lugibihl is now serving as interim country representative for MCC Philippines.

Rosemary Wyse of Goshen College has been named a Fulbright lecturer. She will travel to Uruguay to lecture on teaching English as a foreign language.

The St. Paul (Minn.) Mennonite Fellowship licensed Helen Wells Quintela as its pastor on Feb. 16.

Evan and Arlie Neufeld Schultz have joined the Native Ministries staff of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. They are filling a pastoral role in the northern Manitoba community of Bloodvein River.



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